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Ex-CIA man says Casey blocked some data on political grounds

By Alfonso Chardy
Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A top intelligence analyst who resigned after CIA Director William J. Casey altered one of his secret reports on Mexico contends that Casey and Pentagon officials consistently reject analyses for political reasons.

In a magazine article, John Horton said Casey ~~dismissed his estimate~~ of the number of Cuban soldiers on Grenada — an estimate later verified by the U.S. forces that invaded the Caribbean island nation — because it did not support the administration's view.

Horton also accused a senior Pentagon official of rewriting a military analyst's report on weaknesses in the Salvadoran armed forces, and he contended that the administration was involved in a series of intelligence failures — including the Grenada invasion and the mining of Nicaraguan harbors — that he said the intelligence community would have advised against had it been asked.

Horton was a top CIA operations officer from 1948 to 1975. In 1983 and

1984 he was chief Latin America officer for the National Intelligence Council, which prepares foreign intelligence estimates.

The article, in this month's issue of Foreign Service Journal, is Horton's first written comment on the CIA since he resigned last year, although he had been interviewed about the resignation.

Horton wrote that Casey was critical of the Grenada estimate because it minimized the size of the Cuban forces on the island and did not support the administration contention that the airport the Cubans were building there would be used for military purposes.

The United States had asserted that there were more than 1,000 Cubans on the island, but Cuba said there were 786, most of them construction workers. Horton's estimate agreed with Havana's and contradicted U.S. assertions that the discrepancy was due to many Cubans hiding in the hills.

Intelligence officials, meeting on the Sunday after the October 1983 invasion, "finally concluded that no one remained in the hills," Horton

wrote. But the next day, "a person with some responsibility in the [intelligence] community, although not himself an intelligence officer, asked to read the assessment. Later ... he said, 'I think it stinks.' ... I went to see Casey as soon as I could. He was less abrupt, merely finding it 'unimaginative.'"

"I can only suppose that the assessment was 'unimaginative' because of what it did not say. For example, we could have said that the Cuban construction workers were actually combat troops in disguise, or that the arms found in Grenada were destined to be used to overthrow friendly governments elsewhere in the Caribbean, or that the airfield was not for tourism but for Soviet reconnaissance aircraft."

Horton also wrote that a confidential study prepared last year by a military analyst was rewritten by a Pentagon official because it "contained a discussion of the Salvadoran armed forces' weaknesses." While not identifying the official, Horton said he was "heavily involved in supporting the armed forces of El Salvador."

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